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ABSTRACT

The implementation of a field experience program for a university situated in a large and sparsely populated area is described. Twelve faculty teams pprovide the structure for student advising, instruction, and supervision of field experiences. The need for a single organizational unit to facilitate the logistics of integrating the wide-spread activities of students and faculty members generated the concept of a Field-Based Center. When field experiences are requested, the Field-Based Center Director contacts the designated person in each district, and arrangements are made. These include assigning the student, arranging transportation, providing course assignments for the classroom teachers, and orienting the student to procedures and rules in the school or agency. Operations of each Field-Based Center are governed by an advisory board made up of teachers, administrators, and representatives from the school districts. (JD)

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FIELD-BASED CENTERS: THE MISSING LINK?

Background

During the Spring months of 1972, Ohio's Board of Education launched the nation's most massive search for educational priorities. Known in the state as Ohio's "Search for Consensus", more than 600 Local Citizen Assemblies, 88 County Citizen Assemblies, and 12 Regional Meetings were held to gather purposeful input about the educational system from more than 125,000 citizens. Better teacher preparation was called for in virtually every meeting. On May 14, 1973 the State Board of Education passed a resolution calling for a transformation of teacher education through a "thorough, comprehensive and appropriate restructuring". This restructuring was facilitated by the adoption of new state standards for teacher education. These standards were adopted on December 9, 1974 with July, 1980 established as the effective date for implementation. Each college or university preparing teachers was charged to develop an institutional plan for meeting the standards.

The standards mandate clinical and field experiences for teacher education students commencing early in their professional preparation. These experiences should be related to schoolage youth and equivalent in time to one full quarter in addition to student teaching. The field experiences are to take place in a variety of settings providing exposure to urban and suburban or rural schools.

In 1974, a steering committee was established at Miami University to guide the Redesign effort. This steering committee recommended the integration of clinical/field experiences into the courses in the professional education sequence. Both core courses and content/method related courses have a field component.

I realize that this sounds pretty simple to this point and in reality, conceptually there is no complication. However, let me fill you in on two complicating "minor" details. First, Miami University is situated in the small town of Oxford, Ohio, which is one of those towns you "can't get to from here". When the University was established, its virtual isolation was considered an asset by those who wished total immersion in the academic community. However, this isolation has provided a real challenge in the implementation of the field component of our teacher preparation programs.

The local school district is geographically large and sparsely populated. Its eight schools house approximately 3,700 students in rural and suburban settings.

Two other small school districts are located within thirty minutes of the University. Recognizing that we could not distribute our 2,000 plus teacher education students into the nineteen schools of these three districts alone and that none of these schools could provide the mandated urban experience, it was determined that we would have to investigate possible sites within one hour's driving time from the University. To date, 37 school districts

in this sixty mile radius have indicated interest in collaborating and cooperating with Miami University in the preparation of teachers by providing field sites.

Secondly, the field operation is further complicated by the fact that the model for instructional delivery adopted by the faculty of the School of Education and Allied Professions is the team concept.

Twelve teams on the main campus provide the structure for student advising, instruction, and supervision of field experiences. Faculty are assigned to the interdisciplinary teams according to area of expertise and the specialized requirements for particular certification fields.

On the Oxford campus there are two teams offering elementary certification, two teams offering secondary certification (each housing different majors), one team offering health and physical education certification, one team offering physical education certification, one team offering industrial education certification, one team offering home economics certification, one team offering certification requirements for speech pathology and audiology, one team offering art education certification, one team offering music education certification and one team offering requirements for LD, EMR, and MSPR certification.

In addition to faculty in the content fields specific to certification requirements, a faculty member from each department

offering the courses in professional education core also serves on each team. The courses in the professional education sequence are taught by the faculty members serving on the instructional team to the students assigned to the team. This team delivery model affords different program sequences to meet the needs of particular certification requirements.

The focus of our logistical planning to meet program requirements changed from finding enough field sites for the students coordinating the efforts between the twelve faculty teams and 2,000 students on campus and the field-based educators in 263 different buildings in the 37 school districts. Just keeping track of time schedules, vacations/conference days, snow day procedures, etc. for this many schools was reviewed as an overwhelming task. Yet, experience told us that these would be the details which would "make or break" the planned field experience component.

We also needed a structure to systematically gather input from the professional educators in the field to the university faculty teaching the courses and planning the field expereinces. From the desire to have a single organizational structure to facilitate the collaborative and cooperative arrangements and to handle the logistics of moving the students from campus to the field for approximately 200 course integrated hours prior to the student teaching semester, the Field-Based Center concept was born.

The Field-Based Center

The Field-Based Center is a concept not a place. Four Field-Based Centers are a part of the Miami University model for Teacher Preparation. The four centers are comprised of varying numbers of school districts and related educational agencies. The composition of schools and agencies in each center is dependent on geographic proximity and the type of field experience available. Field-based professionals employed in the center school districts and agencies provide the teacher candidates with a variety of observation and participation experiences. These experiences are designed to meet specific course objectives and are supervised by the campus-based faculty.

The operations of each Field-Based Center are handled by a Field-Based Center Director. This person is a Miami University faculty member who serves as the liaison between the on-campus team and the field-based professionals.

When field experiences are requested as part of a university course, the Field-Based Center Director contacts the designated person in each district and the arrangements are made. These arrangements include assigning the student, arranging for transportation, providing course assignments for the classroom teachers, and orienting the college student to procedures and rules in the school or agency.

The Field-Based Center Director, then, serves as the critical communication and coordination linkage between university and public school. It is this linkage which, we feel, will maximize the benefits to the student, the university teams and the public school personnel.

The operations of each Field-Based Center are governed by an advisory board made up of teachers, administrators, and citizen representatives from the school districts. Plans call for these advisory groups to input into the in-service programming provided to the districts by Miami University as well as the field assignments which are a part of the teacher education curriculum. The fully functional advisory boards will be the vehicle for providing for cooperation and collaboration between the University faculty providing instruction in the professional education curriculum and the practicing teachers in the field.

The interaction of the teacher candidate, the campus-based professional educator, and the field-based professional educator provides opportunities:

A. For the teacher candidate:
   1. To link theory with application
   2. To explore a variety of teaching methods
   3. To learn about teaching as a professional career choice

B. For the campus based professional educator:
   1. To interact professionally with colleagues

2. To develop meaningful relationships with students
3. To relate area of expertise to the total professional preparation sequence

C. For the field-based professional educator
1. To maintain professional relationships with University personnel
2. To help "shape" the teaching profession of the future
3. To provide a wider variety of experiences to pupils in the classroom.

Summary

In summary, the Field-Based Center is an organizational structure designed to facilitate meaningful field experiences for teacher education students. It serves as both the conceptual and operational link between the University and the field site allowing for participation in the teacher preparation programs by all those involved. Students will no longer be merely consumers of their education and field-based professionals will no longer be recipients of a finished product called "entry level teacher" with no input into the process. The structure is a dynamic one allowing for individuality, growth, and change.